

## RELATIVISM AND INDOCTRINATION: THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE SOCIAL STUDIES, 1926-1941

JOSEPH WATRAS

In January 1929, the American Historical Association (AHA) nominated a group of eminent scholars and famous educators to form a Commission on the Social Studies. The commission disbanded, however, in December 1933. During those five years, the commission members sought to determine the objectives of classroom instruction and to enlist researchers to produce volumes that would translate the general principles into practical ways for teachers to meet these objectives. The publication of the sixteen different books continued until 1941.

Despite the effort the commission's members expended, critics have complained that the commission and its more active members, Charles A. Beard and George S. Counts, led social studies teachers astray by calling for increased relativism and for indoctrination among teachers. This article will show that instead of proposing radical or misconceived ideas about the social sciences and the role of schooling in facilitating social change, the commission members offered intelligent alternatives, about which reasonable people could disagree.

The evidence for this conclusion comes from two sources. First, the materials published by the commission illustrate a nuanced view of the ideas of relativism and indoctrination rather than the strident call that most people imagine. Second, with the publication of the reports, several different types of scholars offered a jumble of reactions. Since there was no single clear authoritative judgment about the commission's findings, there was probably not a clear mandate to do anything such as destroy traditional values or to force school children to adopt any particular set of views. The issues must have been murky or confused.

The hope of this article is that an investigation into the controversies surrounding the AHA Commission on the Social Studies can help readers understand the role of the social studies and the relation those courses should have to the social sciences and to the development of intelligent and active citizens. Such understandings have become increasingly necessary. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education accused public schools of placing the nation at risk because teachers ignored strict academic instruction. In line with these criticisms, the Bradley Commission produced a report in 1988 that accused high schools of allowing students to enroll in more practically oriented social studies courses instead of academically rigorous history classes. According to the Bradley Commission, students lacked the opportunities to develop judgment and perspectives that would come from historical studies and acquired instead narrow, practical skills.<sup>1</sup> The debates and criticisms that surrounded the work of the AHA Commission on the Social Studies may illuminate these controversies.

### The AHA's Commission on the Social Studies

In 1924, Edgar Dawson delivered to the AHA the report of a survey of the condition of social studies curricula in schools. Dawson and his committee began by listing the recommendations of such earlier reports as the AHA Committee of Seven on the Study of History in the Schools of 1899, the Committee of Eight of 1908, the AHA Committee of Five of 1911, the National Education Association (NEA) Committee on the Social Studies of 1916, and the second Committee of Eight of 1922. Dawson and his group tried to place these various recommendations in some order; they sought to determine if or

how schools followed these recommendations; and they contrived a test to be given to pupils in the eleventh and twelfth grades to see what students learned in history classes. Encountering many problems in constructing their analyses, committee members concluded that school teachers did not follow any pattern and that some group had to make an organized effort to prevent national organizations from working at cross purposes.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of Dawson's report, the AHA set up a planning committee headed by A.C. Krey, a professor of history at the University of Minnesota, to draft a plan for a new study to describe how teachers should present the social studies. Since the AHA could not afford to support a Commission on the Social Studies, the Carnegie Corporation agreed to support the commission's investigation.<sup>3</sup>

The commission began in January 1929 by appointing a sub-committee that included five members of the commission, most notably Charles A. Beard, Guy Stanton Ford, A. C. Krey, and Charles E. Merriam, and three distinguished educators, Franklin Bobbitt, Boyd Bode, and Harold Rugg. For two years, this sub-committee met and discussed the issues in setting the objectives of the commission's work. Beard wrote a draft of the introductory volume, *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools*. After the members of the entire commission made comments, he revised this introductory statement in hopes that it would provide direction for the other members of the commission as they wrote subsequent volumes. The idea was that the other books the commission planned to publish would translate this statement into practical ways of meeting the needs of individual teachers in particular grades.<sup>4</sup>

In *A Charter*, Beard asserted that the supreme purpose of civic instruction was the creation of rich and many-sided personalities within the students. To a contemporary historian, Diane Ravitch, this statement did not provide the direction that school people needed. She claimed that it is difficult to imagine how any course of study could meet this aim.<sup>5</sup> In a similar manner, Hazel Whitman Hertzberg contended the commission report failed to clarify the relationships among the social sciences and left apparent contradictions unanswered. For example, Hertzberg noted *A Charter* expected the social sciences to be neutral when they were scientific but in teachers' hands instruction in the social studies was to be ethical.<sup>6</sup>

To commentators at the time, though, Beard's aim appeared reasonable. For example, Henry Johnson, a member of the AHA commission, explained that Beard's objective of creating rich and many-sided personalities was similar to the one made earlier in the twentieth century by Herbartian educators, such as Charles and Frank McMurry. According to Johnson, the Herbartians sought to create in children many-sided interests. Johnson acknowledged that Beard tended to state objectives in general terms. For example, in *A Charter*, Beard noted that students must develop the ability to remember many things if they are to acquire information. He asserted that the students could develop this ability through practice. According to Johnson, this tendency was similar to the way teachers listed objectives before World War I. Johnson preferred objectives such as cultivating a scientific spirit, transmitting the ideals of democracy, and enlarging toleration among different races, which he claimed appeared in a later volume published by the commission, yet believed these objectives were widely accepted objectives of general education and not specific to the social studies.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, some members of the commission disagreed with Beard and called his aim vague or general. For example, Franklin Bobbitt claimed that it was fruitless to urge teachers to use the social studies to prepare children for citizenship unless the statement listed what a good citizen should be able to do. This was in line with Bobbitt's advocacy of what he called scientific curriculum making, which asked that teachers prepare students to master specific skills deemed valuable for later life. Other members, such as Boyd Bode, disagreed with Bobbitt. They claimed that an overly precise definition of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship would tie the document too closely to present day concerns.<sup>8</sup>

#### The AHA Commission Defines the Objectives for Instruction in the Social Studies

According to Michael Whalen, the vision of the social studies that Beard offered was influenced by his ideas on the nature of historical inquiry and his disposition as a progressive reformer. Beard allowed these orientations to govern his work on the AHA Commission.<sup>9</sup>

In *A Charter*, Beard tried to describe how the various areas of the social sciences could help someone understand and participate intelligently in society. He did not list how the social studies helped good citizens do specific things. For example, Beard wrote that the recognition of the changing nature of society had to shape programs of civic instruction. While educators might agree that children should be taught to respect the United States Constitution, Beard claimed that this implied the Constitution represented unchanging truth. But Beard pointed out that the Constitution provided for changing its own structure, and different people, such as Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, held different ideas of what the document meant. Thus, Beard concluded that the best schools could do was to prepare children to recognize the changing nature of society, to appreciate the diversity of opinions, and to observe the nature of things.<sup>10</sup>

Beard appeared to criticize the approach followed by another member of his sub-committee, Harold Rugg. In the 1920s, Rugg developed a series of textbooks based on social problems that he arranged in an order appropriate to the students' abilities. By organizing his texts around social problems, Rugg thought he could integrate or unify the various social sciences and he could teach the children to think critically about the problems facing society.<sup>11</sup> Although Beard did not mention him by name, he criticized two assumptions made by Rugg. The first was to assume that anyone could integrate the social sciences. Beard acknowledged that many researchers crossed the conventional boundaries among the social sciences, but he warned that each of the disciplines had a center of its own that provided ways for the scholars to organize knowledge. The second criticism was a warning against assuming that the only thing social studies teachers need to do is to discuss current issues. He noted three problems with this model of instruction. First, there was no assurance that the problems of the current society would continue into the future. Second, educational authorities might ignore the most significant issues in favor of more trivial ones. Finally, the problems may be irresolvable. Thus, while Beard noted that students should gain some acquaintance with present day social problems, he advised that the students should come to understand the records of human existence before they attacked those problems.<sup>12</sup>

In *A Charter*, Beard noted that industrialism was a conditioning element of society that impinged on the teaching of the social sciences. Because industrialism caused people to leave farms and move to cities and created new professions, Beard pointed out that young people had to develop the capacity to adapt rather than depend on any specific skill or ability to ensure economic security. In addition, Beard noted that industrialism brought what he called "the engineering rationality" to everything including government and social arrangements. As a result, he predicted that rationality, planning, and intelligent cooperation would have increasing sway in domestic and industrial affairs.<sup>13</sup>

When Beard described the increased need for government planning, he repeated a theme that a biographer, Clyde W. Barrow, found was an important part of his work since the turn of the century. Barrow notes that Beard's first book, *The Industrial Revolution*, published in 1901, argued that a rationalized system of finance dominated by modern corporations was replacing what was called laissez-faire capitalism. According to Barrow, Beard sought to prevent the domination of a form of corporate feudalism and replace it with some democratically accountable form of economic governance.<sup>14</sup>

Beard's explanation of such things as the need for government control of the economy did not detract from the popularity of his introductory volume. Reviewers praised Beard's *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools*, and readers purchased it.<sup>15</sup> Two years later, however, when the commission released what was supposed to be the summary volume, entitled *Conclusions and Recommendations*, educators criticized these same suggestions.

#### Controversy Greets the Recommendations of the AHA Commission on the Social Studies

In 1932, the commission appointed a three member subcommittee to write a summary volume entitled *Conclusions and Recommendations*. The members included A.C. Krey, Charles Beard, and George Counts. According to Lawrence J. Dennis' description of the events, when Krey fell ill, Counts and Beard completed the summary, although no specific authors are listed on the volume. Dennis adds that, in 1933, the commission reviewed the first draft of the document. The meeting resulted in heated

discussions centering on the authors' use of the words "collectivism" and "indoctrination." Beard defined collectivism as cooperative control with state facilitation and Counts defended the term, indoctrination, claiming that all schools indoctrinate students. To address the objections, Counts worked with other commission members to revise the *Conclusions and Recommendations*. Despite the revisions, four members refused to sign the document.<sup>16</sup>

When Dennis considers why the four dissenters refused to sign, he claims that they did not object to the ideas found in the *Conclusions and Recommendations* but had more personal or specific reasons for resisting. Charles E. Merriam agreed in general with the ideas but he complained that the report overemphasized the peculiar viewpoint of Beard and Counts. Edmund E. Day withdrew his signature to support Merriam, and another member, Ernest Horn, refused to sign because the report did not portray the role of testing and measurement in a reasonable way. Frank Ballou refused to sign for political reasons even though he had served as secretary of the commission.<sup>17</sup>

To some extent, Dennis' explanations make sense. For example, Horn had reason to disagree with the view of testing that appeared in the *Conclusions and Recommendations*. In 1937, Horn wrote a volume on the methods of instruction that the commission published. In his book, Horn claimed that tests could help develop students' understanding if they were built in ways that asked the students to draw some inferences in order to answer the questions.<sup>18</sup> The view that Horn presented in his volume for the commission was opposite the view that the commission presented in its summary document. The commission's *Conclusions and Recommendations* asserted that new type tests could do positive damage to students' minds and that there was no substitute for older forms of examination or the thoughtful judgments of living teachers. *Conclusions and Recommendations* contended that the best test of the social science program was the responses students made to social situations throughout their lives.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, however, some of Dennis' explanations seem inaccurate. For example, in Dennis' description, Ballou refused to sign because, as the superintendent of Washington, D.C. schools, he was vulnerable to attacks from his board and from the United States Congress. Although this makes some sense, it contradicts Ballou's explanations. In 1936, United States Representative Thomas L. Blanton of Texas led a congressional debate accusing Ballou of being a communist. Blanton based his accusations on excerpts from the commission's *Conclusions and Recommendations*.<sup>20</sup> Despite these circumstances, Ballou claimed that he refused to sign the document because the chapter on tests and measurements did serious injustice to what he called the scientific movement in education and the book gave no directions to improve instruction in his schools. To Ballou, the commission's *Conclusions and Recommendations* offered glittering generalities instead of definite recommendations.<sup>21</sup>

Although historians and educators received *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools* differently than they did the *Conclusions and Recommendations*, four examples illustrate the similarity of the two volumes. First, *A Charter* described a structure of ideas that should guide all instruction in the social sciences while *Conclusions and Recommendations* described the frame of reference for the social sciences. In both books, however, these guidelines included the necessities of scholarship, the realities of life in American society, and the requirements of the teaching and learning process. Second, both volumes claimed that the aim of the social sciences in schools was the creation of rich and many-sided personalities among the students. Third, both volumes noted that the age of individualism and laissez faire economics and governance in the United States was coming to a close. Both volumes claimed that a new age of collectivism was emerging in this so-called period of transition. Finally, both volumes drew on reports of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends to reinforce the observation that state planning in the economy was necessary. Herbert Hoover had created that committee in 1929 and several members of the AHA Commission on the Social Studies wrote parts of Hoover's committee's report, *Recent Social Trends in the United States*.

The similarities between the two volumes issued by the entire commission are important because it suggests that there was nothing radically wrong with the commission's proposals. If there had been something wrong with the ideas, the initial document should have caused as much controversy as that which resulted from the second document. Instead, the first was greeted with admiration and the second

enjoyed a mixed reaction at best. To explore this point, it is necessary to consider the objections of a critic who asserted that the commission's work was misdirected.

In 1969, C.A. Bowers complained that *Conclusions and Recommendations* introduced what he called "a bizarre social reform proposal" to which the AHA contributed its prestige. Bowers asserted that the AHA should have disassociated itself from this report and condemned the use of indoctrination, but he noted that numerous references in the AHA proceedings praise the commission's work as the most important undertaken by the Association. Thus, the AHA gave educators the impression that the association supported such methods because, Bowers believes, the report implied they were appropriate.<sup>22</sup>

The reasonable nature of the commission's work, though, might become clear by recognizing three ways in which Bowers overstated the problems. First, Bowers discounted the historians' appreciation for activism that grew among the members of the AHA during the Great Depression. Second, Bowers ignored the criticisms that historians and educators made about the commission's recommendations. Third, Bowers made the commission's plea for indoctrination worse than it was. The sections that follow consider these points in turn.

### Ideas of Historical Relativism Grow and Encounter Criticism Among Historians

At the 1934 annual meeting of the AHA, Association Secretary Dexter Perkins announced that the Commission on the Social Studies was disbanding. Perkins praised the commission and its chairperson, A.C. Krey, for performing admirably.<sup>23</sup>

Such praise could be expected from members of the AHA for the work of a group that included such an esteemed member as Charles Beard. Born in 1874, Beard, with his published 1912 volume *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, had offered progressive historians a way to think about the state, the government, and the law that satisfied their desire for realism and strengthened their aspirations for reform. In this book, Beard sought to show that the United States Constitution could be understood by considering the different groups that united in 1787 to form the new government. In undertaking this task, Beard satisfied the desire of progressives for realism by going to the former Treasury Department and searching through records to determine the economic and social status of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. At the same time, he strengthened progressives' aspirations for reform by showing that the ideals found in the Constitution were expressions of the interests of the founders. At a time when conservatives argued that the Constitution represented absolute, unchanging truth, Beard's view was essential to the cause of social reform because Beard had suggested that reformers could change the values as conditions altered by implying that social conditions had influenced the founders' values. By 1936, Beard's perception of the Constitution appeared in college textbooks as the view accepted by most historians. In 1938, when the editors of the *New Republic* surveyed intellectuals for a list of books that had changed their minds, Beard's volume was second only to Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.<sup>24</sup>

In 1934, Beard expressed in two forms his views of the problems facing historians. The first form was a volume he wrote for the AHA Commission on the Social Studies. The second form was his presidential address to the AHA. In both instances, Beard described the difficulties social scientists faced as they tried to perform work that was intellectually honest and socially valuable. When Beard presented these ideas in his volume for the commission, Henry Elmer Barnes reviewed the book warmly. Barnes praised Beard for demonstrating the irony in that researchers who studied society to offer useful reforms lost the objectivity of science because ethical considerations entered into their work.<sup>25</sup> In that same year, though, Beard's presidential address sparked considerable controversy among historians. Such mixed reactions raise doubts that Beard offered dramatic or radical interpretations.

In his book for the commission, *The Nature of the Social Sciences*, Beard noted that the social sciences provide knowledge that is indispensable for human affairs. He acknowledged that the empirical or scientific method used by social scientists helped in accumulating this information. But when social scientists tried to organize the information in ways that people could use, they moved into subjective areas that required them to make choices among values and philosophical perspectives. Thus, Beard

contended that social scientists lost their objectivity when they tried to make something useful. Although Beard recognized that social scientists should offer research relevant to social needs, he warned that researchers could not remain objective and discover absolute laws of social change. Within these limitations, though, Beard thought he could find the appropriate objectives for courses in the social sciences.<sup>26</sup>

Beard expressed similar ideas in his 1934 presidential address, “Written History as an Act of Faith.” In this short but famous statement, Beard defined history as contemporary thought about the past. This definition was more profound than it appeared at first sight. It implied that historians had to recognize their frames of reference, recognize the biases and limitations these frames imposed, and use them to predict the direction in which events were taking the world. Following his own imperatives, Beard claimed that he believed the world was moving toward what he called a collectivist democracy.<sup>27</sup>

In his speech, Beard attributed his view to the work of Benedetto Croce whose essays on the theory and practice of history appeared, in English translation, in 1920. But Ellen Nore argues that Beard avoided Croce’s tendency toward an extremely subjective orientation. She thinks that, in his speech, Beard captured the paradox of the human condition. This was that, in order to act morally, people must believe that they are free and can think clearly although place, time, material circumstances, and social class appear to condition their thoughts. She claims the only possible resolution is to leap into an act of faith.<sup>28</sup>

Conservative historians did not accept the complimentary view that Nore offers. They disapproved of what Beard came to call limited relativism. In 1935, Theodore Clark Smith of Williams College delivered a speech to the AHA describing the “Writing of American History in America, from 1884 to 1934.” After surveying the work of other historians, Smith argued that Beard’s analysis of the United States Constitution made the idea of objectivity impossible because it reduced the ideals of the Federalists to a collection of verbal arguments that cloaked their real intentions. In addition, Smith accused Beard of turning his complaints on historians by portraying objective historical reporting as impossible. Smith claimed that Beard reduced history to a record of the march of society toward collectivist democracy. In contrast, Smith called the nonpartisan search for truth a noble dream on which historical study and the AHA rested.<sup>29</sup>

Beard replied to Smith in a paper entitled “That Noble Dream” in which he described Smith as creating a false dilemma. According to Beard, the problem was that Smith had divided historians into two groups. One group sought the objective truth. The other group sought to illuminate the quandaries of present day life and thereby facilitate reform. But Beard claimed that Smith had over-generalized. There were many more than two groups and more orientations than the belief that a historian should pursue the absolute truth and the view that historians should discover the backgrounds of contemporary issues. More important, Beard believed this pluralism of perspectives was what made the AHA viable. Opposing Smith’s assertions, Beard claimed that the AHA had no official creed, and that this meant that historians should indulge their desires to explore a wide range of issues. Thus, historians should explore the assumptions on which they based their work. Ironically, Beard hoped that such self-conscious examinations would bring them closer to the truth by reminding them that they were human beings.<sup>30</sup>

Historians were not the only group of intellectuals who disagreed with Beard’s views on the nature and object of historical research. Educators disagreed about the wisdom of those views as they found expression in the commission’s *Conclusions and Recommendations*. As was the case for disagreements among historians, the fact that educators could not agree suggests that the commission offered intelligent proposals about which reasonable people could disagree.

### Educators Bring Forth Criticisms and Question the Reasonableness of Indoctrinating Students

The disagreements about the work of the AHA Commission appeared with the publication of the commission’s *Conclusions and Recommendations*. Among the complimentary reviews was an unsigned summary of the contents of the commission’s final report that appeared in the journal *School and Society* in May 1934. The editorial applauded the commission for constructing a plan to meet the demands of a

collectivist order while preserving the freedom of the individuals.<sup>31</sup> In August 1934, though, Franklin Bobbitt complained that *Conclusions and Recommendations* asserted the coming of a new age of collectivism but did not clearly describe nor substantiate it. He disliked the aim of creating rich, many-sided personalities in order that they may shape the coming society in accordance with American ideals because he thought this aim implied that the teachers indoctrinate the children to hold specific ideals. He also complained that the commission did not present a scientifically based set of findings for social change.<sup>32</sup> In October 1934, Philip W. L. Cox of New York University responded to Bobbitt's complaints, claiming that the conclusion about the coming age of collectivism was not startling. He said it was "humdrum." More importantly, Cox believed that the commission used the scientific method in accumulating its evidence and the members made ethical and esthetic interpretations of those findings on the basis of the frame of reference that they adopted.<sup>33</sup>

In 1934, Boyd Bode, who had been part of the subcommittee to draft *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools*, joined the critics of *Conclusions and Recommendations* by focusing on the commission's use of a frame of reference to guide teachers of the social sciences. To Bode, the frame of reference contradicted the claims about democracy that appeared in the report. If the commission members trusted the intelligence of other people, *Conclusion and Recommendations* would not offer this guide for correct thinking.<sup>34</sup>

Bode's comment is ironic because it suggests that he agreed with historian Theodore Clark Smith, who reacted strongly against Beard's idea of limited relativism in historical writing. In this specific criticism, Bode seems to suggest that teachers and students could discover objective evidence about society and evaluate it on their own. This suggests that Bode accepted the view that a form of absolutism is correct, provided the absolute truth is discovered by different people independently. It is ironic that such comments could come from Bode because in most of his other works Bode wrote against any form of absolutism.

A final set of criticisms came from teachers who feared that they would lose their jobs if they presented evidence about social changes that threatened the narrow, vested interests then controlling school boards. For example, in a letter to *School and Society*, Julian Aronson claimed that large corporations and business interests would not tolerate any teacher criticizing laissez faire capitalism. Aronson claimed that teachers criticized the *Conclusions and Recommendations* for not carrying suggestions about methods of teaching. But in reality, he added, they feared that school boards would fire them if they adopted the direction the commission suggested.<sup>35</sup>

Bode's and Aronson's comments illuminate the question of indoctrination that Bowers attributes to Counts. At worst, Counts seems guilty of poor word choice. In the volume he wrote for the commission, *The Social Foundations of Education*, Counts defined education as a process of inducting children into a social group. For him, the purpose of education in an integrated industrial society should be to impart to all children a spirit of cooperation that would encourage them to work for the common good and to realize that all people should share in the material resources of society. He thought that children should learn to avoid narrow feelings of nationalism that could lead to war among nations. He also warned against schools turning into instruments of propaganda for vested interests. Instead, he asked schools to present the findings of science in ways that enabled students to recognize how society is changing and how to advance the ideals of democracy.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, Aronson described real problems facing teachers. Charles Beard realized the tenuous position of teachers because he had resigned from Columbia University in 1917 to protest the actions of the board of trustees in firing a professor who expressed pacifist views. To counter the problems teachers faced, the commission asked Howard K. Beale to write two volumes on the problem of freedom for teachers in American schools. In keeping with Beard's observation that groups and parties controlled American politics, Beale encouraged teachers to form strong professional associations similar to trade unions. But many of his other suggestions seemed to depend on the willingness of authorities to help teachers. For example, Beale recommended reorganizing schools to allow teacher councils to share control with administrators and increasing legal protection to recognize teacher tenure.<sup>37</sup>

Most of Beale's suggestions revolved around political remedies that teachers should pursue on their own. These suggestions aimed at combating controversy. Other authors that wrote for the commission made more clever suggestions. They recommended designing the curriculum in ways that forestalled controversy.

#### The Authors of the Different Texts Make Specific Suggestions

In her monograph on social studies reform, Hertzberg did not devote much attention to the volume written by Leon Marshall with his daughter, Rachel Marshall Goetz. This volume, *Curriculum Making in the Social Studies: A Social Process Approach*, proved most important, though, because it provided the commission with a way for teachers to avoid political controversies and remain true to the progressive ideal of reforming society. Marshall had begun thinking of this approach as he wrote textbooks for junior and senior high school students before the AHA formed its commission. At the first meeting of the commission, he presented his scheme and he received little support. But as he developed the plan, he found the committee members comments increasingly helpful. Finally, one member of the commission, Henry Johnson, praised Marshall for developing a unique approach to curriculum, claiming that he was the first educator to propose such a model.<sup>38</sup>

The model that appeared in Marshall and Goetz's book was simple. Although the authors acknowledged that experts might disagree about which social process are found in all societies, they claimed that a list of five categories or processes provided a simple means to organize social studies curricula. These included adjusting to the external world, continuing biologically, guiding human motivation, developing social organization, securing cultural continuance, and molding personality. According to the authors, this scheme had several advantages. If students learned these sets of processes, they could group information about social living in meaningful units. They could build on their own experiences, and they would be prepared to take part in engineering improvements in their own society.<sup>39</sup>

To explain how the students learned to take part in social engineering, Marshall and Goetz offered examples of how the process approach enabled students to consider contemporary difficulties in objective manners. Under the category, "Adjusting to the External World," the authors listed economic activities. They noted that, using the process approach, students realized that every society had to find some way to determine what the members would produce, to decide how to apportion resources, and to work out ways of sharing the products. In this way, students understood that the ways each society chose to apportion resources, for example, had to coincide with the values accepted by the people in the society. According to Marshall and Goetz, such lessons showed the students that changing economic systems was not simple but required reforms carried out with broad understandings.<sup>40</sup>

#### The Influence of the AHA Commission on the Social Studies Spread Through Secondary Schools

According to Hazel W. Hertzberg, the volumes that followed the commission reports were the work of individual authors and most were of fine quality. In her judgment, however, they did not offer a clear, marked influence. She claimed that although the commission's official statements and the accompanying volumes were widely discussed in the social studies literature of the 1930s, their influence was diverse.<sup>41</sup>

Peter Novick made a similar observation in his book *That Noble Dream*. Novick claimed that the commission's research into the various problems of education did not impress the members of the AHA, and that the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) rejected the model of the social studies endorsed by the AHA commission.<sup>42</sup>

While it is difficult to prove whether the members of the AHA were impressed with their commission, it should be easy to show whether or how the CEEB recommended that history be taught. In fact, contrary to Novick's assertion that the CEEB rejected the model of social studies endorsed by the AHA commission, the CEEB recommended in a 1936 report that teachers follow the book that Leon Marshall and his daughter, Rachael Marshall Goetz, wrote for the AHA commission as an appropriate model in constructing a curriculum in history.<sup>43</sup>



In the present day, Marshall's and Goetz's social process model remains a significant curriculum idea. For example, in 1988 members of the Bradley Commission on History in Schools published their report, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in the Schools*. Although this report complained that too many students took social studies classes instead of history courses, the authors appropriated the social process model devised by Marshall and Goetz, without acknowledging their debt, when they described the themes that all history courses should cover.<sup>44</sup>

The controversy over the AHA Commission on the Social Studies was complex. The reports and the accompanying volumes raised questions about the roles of intellectuals, the function of secondary school teachers, and the appropriate nature of textbooks. These questions were not easily resolved. Instead of simple, concrete answers, the commission offered intelligent observations on the way people should think about these issues and the ways they were connected to social life. The commission could not solve the issues, which persist in contemporary society. It may be that the best way to confront these issues is to look to the controversies that surrounded the work of Beard, Counts, Beale, Marshall, and Goetz. From these experiences, contemporary readers can gain several insights into the welter of contradictory forces and ideas involved in any educational program.

## NOTES

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